

ISSUES & EVENTS

February 4, 1971 Volume 2 No. 17

■ Campus turmoil, page 3

■ Creative writing, page 2

university council

At its meeting on January 29, University Council continued discussion on revisions to the SGWU Code, redefining the ombudsman office.

The office now calls for a group of three persons, already in the employ of the University, who enjoy the confidence of the University as a whole. They shall be appointed by the Principal acting on the advice of a search committee named by him. The search committee would be representative of all who study, teach and work at the University, and would invite the University to submit candidates.

Anyone who studies, teaches or works at the University shall have the right to apply to the ombudsman office on any matter of concern. The ombudsmen would decide among

University records except those which cannot be released for reasons of confidentiality; they can appeal decisions with regard to confidentiality to the Board of Governors. It is expected that the ombudsmen, as acting conciliators, will be able to resolve many problems before they reach a stage where formal procedures become necessary.

The Principal, commenting on this "latest solution to the problems of organizational life", stressed that no new appointment was being proposed because of the scarcity of resources; three present members, providing as wide a knowledge as possible of the workings of the University, would be taken away from some of their other duties to serve as ombudsmen. He mentioned that there were not as many cases under the Student Code as had been anticipated.

Roger Verschingel thought that the part-time concept would not impress people with service; Dean Flynn suggested a review of the operation after a two-year period.

The section of the proposed Code dealing with plagiarism was clarified. "Gross plagiarism" would now draw the same penalties as cheating.

University Council called for the full document, with changes to date, to be presented in *Issues & Events* for comment by all members of the University.

In other business, Council gave approval to all Faculties for Mature Student Qualifying Programs, providing collegial credits to those over 21. The Arts' MSQP (pronounced "Musquup") would run courses of topical interest to attract more partial students.

A re-write of the Examinations and Advancement section of the calendar required instructors to announce to the class their methods in arriving at the final grade. Discussion on when, how and how to enforce ended with the document going to Registrar Ken Adams for revision.



education: a human contradiction

john macdonald

The extraordinary difficulties that formal education has experienced in carrying out its tasks are explained satisfactorily if we make one assumption. Except under special circumstances, man is not easily teachable.

While this assertion of mine runs counter to just about everything one reads about education, I suspect that a great deal of evidence could be gathered to support it. Nor is it difficult to see, if we accept in general evolutionary doctrine, how such an anti-pedagogical strain may have arisen in man. Teachability, in a very threatening environment, such as that lived in by many generations of early men, may have little survival value, since what is passed on tends to be how the last crisis was met, or how to cope with the problems of a temporary equilibrium.

When the new crisis, which may be quite unlike the last, makes its appearance, having been taught too well may inspire lethal hesitations and compromises, thus conferring on the easily teachable an evolutionary disadvantage.

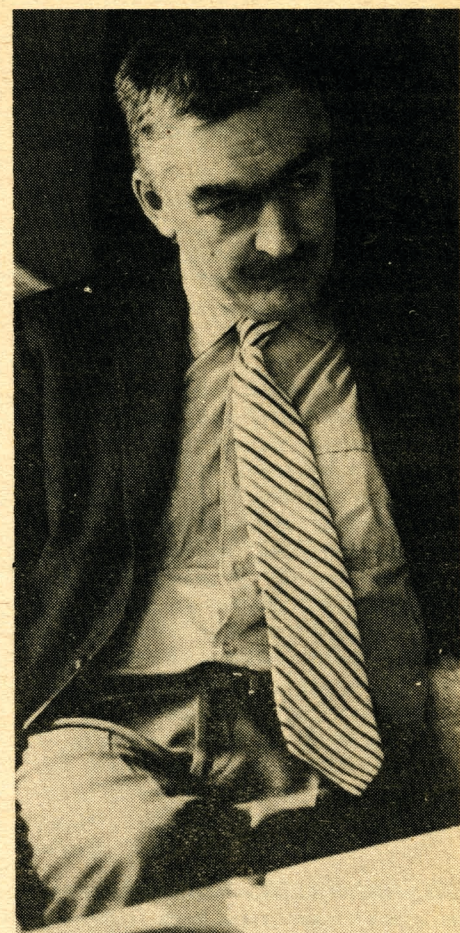
Threatening environments did not disappear with the appearance of civilization - indeed, they still exist within our own

society - but it may perhaps be granted, for the sake of argument, that there is a difference in kind between the predominantly social dangers that most men in most societies have now expected to face for many generations and the predominantly natural dangers faced by our remote ancestors. Moreover, being easily teachable has considerable apparent advantages in modern societies, ranging from economic preferment to the occasional transmutation of persons into a higher state of non-teachability. The last point deserves more than passing attention. It can be put more simply. If one may be taught easily, in conditions in which there is very much to be taught, then the possibility exists of reaching a stage in which one cannot be taught at all, at least in the ordinary sense, but instead teaches oneself.

Formal education, then, established by society out of necessity, embodies a human contradiction, in that it sets out to teach persons many of whom are by evolutionary definition not easily teachable. I do not deny that there are other ways of looking at formal education, and of accounting for its failures. But this seems to me the fundamental thesis.

There has been a wave of interest recently in informal education, or what is thought to be informal education (this is one of the ideas behind contemporary attacks on schools and universities for being unreal, irrelevant, etc. - attacks, incidentally, which largely miss the point, since, as I have already suggested, it is precisely the business of formal education to be non-obvious). Informal education is best described as education in context. When my father taught me to harness a horse or to use a pick or shovel, this was informal education. As compared with formal education, informal education has great advantages, and equally great disadvantages are, first, that there are the seeming naturalness of its pedagogy, and the close relationship of what is being taught to the life of the learner; its great disadvantages, are, first, that there are very definite limits to what can be taught in context, and, secondly, that the typical methods - imitation, trial-and-error, etc. - are suitable only for certain kinds of learning tasks. The first limitation is probably stronger than the second, since one can hypothesize extensions of the methodology. In any case, since the teachability variable is much less of a problem for informal education, there is a great deal to be said for extending its use in

modern society, which has tended to assimilate everything that is to be taught to the model of formal education, thereby compounding its difficulties. Extending its use, however, does not mean an impossible pursuit of informality in formal education, but rather the attempt to distinguish between what is properly the sphere of formal education, and what should be consigned to other approaches.



What formal and informal education have in common is the intention to teach. When this does not exist, in a situation in which

continued page 2

from page 1

learning may occur, we talk about 'learning from experience'. There have always, so far as we know, been persons ready to insist that learning from experience, as they understand it, is superior to any other form of learning, and sometimes that it is the only valid form of learning. This used to be thought of as a reactionary point of view, very prevalent among self-made millionaires, grasping farmers, etc., but now seems to be acceptable in progressive circles. It has severe defects, which should be obvious at a glance. The direct experience of a single person is very limited, and, after a certain stage in life, tends to be highly repetitive in character. Also, Nature - and what we are discussing here is Man and Nature, which includes other Men - Nature is not in the business of teaching: what it requires for immediate survival is not understanding, but conformity to a set of minimum rules. It is essential that one learns from experience that fire is to be approached with caution: one may, how-

ever go through life quite easily with all kinds of unfounded fears. No doubt some persons do use their experience fruitfully; and it may perhaps be possible to learn how to learn from experience; but what is in general most evident is that human beings do not, once they have mastered some simple rules, learn much from experience. Conceivably at a time in the past when men were much more dependent on direct experience for mental content they were also better at assimilating it; if so, we have lost the art.

To summarize, then, it may be said that men in the mass are trapped, if I may use

an analogy from Marx, in an Asiatic mode, so far as mental production is concerned. They cannot gain much from formal education; they have less opportunity for informal education than in the past; they do not possess, or have lost, the capacity to use experience. The modern world is the construction of the few, in which only the few are at home, or understand enough to speculate about alternatives, while the rest stand bewildered, or engage in random action (the basis of the accepted politics of liberal democracy), or chase after strange gods, or are reduced to hopelessness, defeat, or fantasies of violence. No doubt the specific economic system under which we live has many peculiar evils, and stands to be condemned on these grounds alone; but there is more to the problem than that, as the history of the societies that have tried economic revolution attests (I specifically except here China, about which I cannot yet be sure). Although I do not invariably agree with R.D. Laing, he puts

the problem, seen from a certain point of view, very well, in *The Politics of Experience*: 'What is to be done? Can we... living in the often fibrillating heartland of a senescent capitalism... do more than sing our sad and bitter songs of disillusion and defeat? Our alienation goes to the roots. Viewed in different perspectives, construed in different ways and expressed in different idioms, this realization unites men as diverse as Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Tillich and Sartre... the ordinary person is a shrivelled, desiccated fragment of what a person can be. As adults, we have forgotten most of our childhood,

not only its contents but its flavour; as men of the world, we hardly know of the existence of the inner world; we barely remember our dreams, and make little sense of them when we do; as for our bodies, we retain just sufficient proprioceptive sensations to co-ordinate our movements and to ensure the minimum requirements for biosocial satisfaction - to register fatigue, signals for food, sex, defecation, sleep; beyond that, little or nothing. Our capacity to think, except in the service of what we are dangerously deluded in supposing is our self-interest, and in conformity with common sense, is pitifully limited; our capacity even to see, hear, touch, taste and smell is so shrouded in veils of mystification that an intensive discipline of un-learning is necessary for *anyone* before one can begin to experience the world afresh... And immediate experience of, in contrast to belief or faith in, a spiritual realm of demons, spirits, Powers, Dominions, Principalities, Seraphim and Cherubim, the

Light, is even more remote... This state of affairs represents an almost unbelievable devastation of our experience. Then there is empty chatter about maturity, love, joy, peace... It is quite certain that unless we can regulate our behaviour much more satisfactorily than at present, then we are going to exterminate ourselves!

The above is an excerpt of John Macdonald's lecture entitled Education of the Masses, delivered January 27 as part of the public lecture series on Education. Professor Macdonald is chairman of Education.

letters

creative writing

Students have often expressed disappointment at the limited number of courses within our Creative Writing program as well as the limited scope of these courses. For instance, my 419 evening class has no fewer than six students engaged in longer works such as a full-length play or a novel with no continuation courses offered for their further guidance.

I am sure that the need exists for an amplification of our writing program. At the very least, the whole issue cries out for exploration, especially in these changing times when such areas of specialization are eagerly being sought. It is highly conceivable that a firmly based center for the writing arts at Sir George would attract not only local student interest but might also encourage outside participation.

I propose a thoroughly practical approach that would expose students initially to a wide range of writing skills and would provide eventual specialization, all this within a three-year undergraduate period. It is feasible too that such a program might lead to a future graduate degree in writing such as an MWA (Master of Writing Arts).

Among the various writing modes that could be offered, I envisage the following: various aspects of journalism; writing for radio and TV; advertising techniques; writing for the theatre; the short story; the novel; juveniles; film scripts; and so on.

links with various writing modes such as newspapers, publishers, studios, film companies, etc., so that students would in effect not be working in limbo as is the case currently.

I suggest that we abandon the traditional "course" structure where one instructor lectures for 13 or 26 weeks in favor of what I call a "point" system. That is, the first year or the first two years of our undergraduate program could be divided into a number of seminars, each lasting the number of weeks required to cover that particular writing mode, each particular seminar taught by an expert in that field. At the end of a 26-week period, the student might have been exposed to several writing modes taught by several instructors for a 100% total of 26 points. A percentage pass out of 26 would net the student one credit.

A similar system could be planned for the second year. Or the student might begin to specialize before the second year, or wait until his third year if he wished. Thus, our writing program would gain in flexibility and interest.

Difficult as the above program might be to set in motion and develop, I see certain advantages in exploring it. First of all, this is not a new program but one already in partial existence here. Again, we have a formidable array of talent within our own Department which we can call upon. Certainly too, we can draw upon allied departments such as Fine Arts for interdisciplinary instruction. And within a metropolis of this size we have as well a vast pool of other resources outside the University which could be recruited on a nominal short-term basis as outlined above. Sketchy as the above suggestions are, I would urge that we explore the possibilities and make known our findings to interested provincial authorities as soon as possible.

Abraham Ram,
ass't. prof., English

BOOK PRESENTATION: The Jewish Chautauqua Society donated several books to the library at a ceremony January 27. Left to right, Sir George Professors Peter Slater, Jean Ouellette, University Librarian Helen Howard, Society members I.H. Morrell, Brahams Silver and Harold Bergman.



campus turmoil : the new situation

john o'brien

While this University is not as young as is sometimes thought (the first university-level courses started in 1929), the rapid growth to its present size of 6,000 full-time students and 9,000 part-time students (all in degree courses) has largely taken place in the last fifteen years. That period is now at an end, and we, in common with other universities, face a new era. Relationships between the university and the community are likely to be more complex in future, and the need for groups of this kind, which can act as a bridge between university and community will be correspondingly greater.

Turmoil on campuses has been very much in the news in recent years. But, in fact, campus disturbances have become far less numerous than they were two or three years ago. There seems to be a kind of delayed reaction in these matters by which the media continue to report a declining phenomenon in the old terms, and the public, once sensitized to the existence of a problem, is not made aware of its growing solution.

I therefore want to say something about the new situation. There is a much higher degree of realism, of effectiveness, of clear thinking among students as a group than there was a few years ago. There is less interest in student membership on innumerable committees, or the proportions between students and others on the senior university bodies, but there is more concern about the quality of the teaching being given, in such down-to-earth dimensions as the availability of the instructor for consultation, or the use of effective teaching techniques. Administrative procedures are questioned when the end result seems unsatisfactory (registration in our case would be the prime example). I emphasize that these are significant questions, and questions that touch the student where it matters — in the effectiveness of his learning as a student. I also emphasize that the students will accept reasonable answers to such questions if they are given — what they will object to is an evasion of the questions. The campus mood is certainly not that of the 1950's — the toleration of what exists because it is there and probably can't be changed anyway. But it is not that of the second half of the 1960's either — the denunciation of the system along with its problems as all part of the machinations of some malevolent establishment with a taste for exploitation. The student press is fascinating in this respect; its articles criticizing the University for some problem often contain the reasons why the problem exists and can't be solved at the moment. Such an approach would have been unthinkable a couple of years ago. Today there is a better balance between participation, responsibility, and iden-

tification of true issues than there has been for some time. Since this is one of the things university education is about, we should be glad of it.

But there are certain characteristics of the campus that cause concern to many people. In large measure they parallel characteristics of society at large. There is no reason to expect the universities to be different from society — they have become mass institutions as the result of society's insistence on higher education for as many as possible, and business's insistence on a higher degree as the gateway to a well-paid job.

One such characteristic is the tendency to cast issues in terms of the absolute. If a principle is good, such as democracy or civil rights, it must be carried through one hundred per cent. If the government is responsible to the people, that government should be able to explain its actions publicly at any time. If national independence is good, then foreign ownership should be controlled. These propositions strike a responsive chord among students. They are also the stuff of which opposition in parliament is made, and they provide material for numerous commentators and interest groups on the national and provincial scene.

In human affairs it is rare that decisions can be made on the pure level of principle. Often there is not enough money to do all the desirable things. Complete information is not available, and decisions must be made in a state of uncertainty about the underlying situation or without knowing what the outcome of any specific action will be. Decision makers must often find a compromise between contradictory principles, or subordinate one principle to another in particular circumstances. Those who view their principles as absolutes have great difficulty in coping with or even comprehending the way in which decisions actually are made. This is one of the factors that will always



create a certain tension between the university and the outside world.

I am trying to make the point that it is neither unusual nor alarming to find such attitudes on the campus. To the extent that students are young, idealistic, and inexperienced, we should expect to find them questioning politicians, university administrators, and experts on all subjects. If these people know their subject, and provide straightforward answers, they will get a good reception. And the cause of education will be advanced. But there is one major weakness that must be recognized by the students themselves, and by the universities. The inability of student groups to assess the forces they themselves set in motion when they organize public seminars will undercut the goals they want to achieve.

When they organize public functions of this type they create the ideal situation for small groups of dissidents or agitators, many of them non-students, to move in and take over. These people are not numerous, but it takes only a small number with the right technique to dominate and become highly visible at a meeting. And inevitably the students themselves will be blamed for any disturbances that may result. The stereotype of campus disorder has been so well established with the public over the last five years that even minor incidents are widely reported and elicit exaggerated interpretations. Here we have student leaders caught in one of the decision-making situations which I described earlier, which they are badly equipped to face. Do they adhere to principles of free speech for all, thereby leaving their meetings open to use by any outsiders, professional dissidents, and bores who may wish to come? Do they take steps to protect the good name of the vast majority of students whose reputations are especially vulnerable at the present moment? It may be ironic to find the students themselves impaled on this classic problem of decision-making, but it is a real problem for them and for the University.

I would hope that one of the interests of this organization would be to bridge in some measure the gaps that exist between the University and the community on issues such as this. This University has taken many positive steps to resolve its problems in the last few years. Nevertheless, the problems change, the people change, and we shall continue to have difficulties from time to time.

Before concluding I would like to say a few words on the recent moves toward inter-university planning, and, as you might expect, on the financial state of the University. The recent statements by the Minister of Education have brought to public notice the intention to develop an overall plan for Quebec universities, in which each institution will have its own specialized and acknowledged role. This is a step which is very much in keeping with the general trends in higher education, and is welcomed by this University. The intentions of the government to proceed with this planning in collaboration with the universities, as shown by two substantial questionnaires recently received from the Council of Universities, is particularly encouraging. At this stage the process is only beginning. Naturally, much will depend upon the effectiveness with which planning is carried out. For the moment we may be pleased with the fact that it is underway.

As for university finances, all we can say at the moment is that they are extremely difficult. For the present year our grants from the government were disastrously low, and although negotiations with the Department of Education have gone on since last June when the grants were announced, we do not yet have a final figure on possible revisions. It is understandable, though not of much help, that a new government forced to take a rapid decision within a month of assuming power, did not have an opportunity to study the problems thoroughly. For this reason the grants decided upon for 1971-72 will be crucial, since they will presumably reveal the government's more considered attitude.

The above is the partial text of the Principal's address to the inaugural meeting of the Sir George Williams University Associates, delivered Wednesday at the Mount Stephen Club.

Colour images of rural and urban Quebec in architect Henri Durand's National Gallery exhibition, gallery II through February 15.



thursday 4

GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION: Council meeting at 6 p.m. in H-769; annual general meeting preparations to be discussed.

CONSERVATORY OF CINEMATOGRAPHIC ART: "Paris qui Dort" (René Clair, 1923) with Henri Rolland and Madeleine Rodrigue at 7 p.m.; "Le Million" (René Clair, 1931) with Annabella, Paul Olivier and René Lefèvre at 9 p.m. in H-110. English subtitles. 50c for students, 75c non-students.

POLITICAL SCIENCE SOCIETY: Prof. C.B. Macpherson, University of Toronto, on "A Political Theory of Property" at 4 p.m. in H-920.

FINE ARTS DEPARTMENT: Two plays will be presented in the Douglass Burns Clarke Theatre at 8:30 p.m. - "Jack, or the Submission" by Eugene Ionesco and "Almost Like Being" by Jean-Claude van Itallie; free.

GALLERY I and WEISSMAN GALLERY: "45° 30'N - 73° 36'W", new art concerned with concept, process, system, through February 17.

GALLERY II: "Quebec in Colour" - Collection of colour photographs by Henri Durand; on loan from the National Gallery, through February 15.

BIOLOGY CLUB: Meeting 1 - 2 p.m. in H-420.

GEORGIAN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP: Meeting 12 - 1 p.m. in H-615.

friday 5

CONSERVATORY OF CINEMATOGRAPHIC ART: "Sous les Toits de Paris" (René Clair, 1930) with Albert Préjean and Polla Illery at 7 p.m.; "A Nous la Liberté" (René Clair, 1931) with Raymond Cordy, Henri Marchand and Rolla France at 9 p.m. in H-110. English sub-titles. 50c for students, 75c non-students.

FINE ARTS DEPARTMENT: Two plays to be presented in the Douglass Burns Clarke theatre at 8:30 p.m. - "Jack, or the Submission" by Eugene Ionesco and "Almost Like Being" by Jean-Claude van Itallie; free.

ARTS FACULTY COUNCIL: Meeting at 2 p.m. in H-769.

CHINESE GEORGIANS: Meeting 4 - 6 p.m. in H-820.

WINTER CARNIVAL: Instructions for car rally 7 - 8:30 p.m. in H-937.

saturday 6

CONSERVATORY OF CINEMATOGRAPHIC ART: "14 Juillet" (René Clair, 1932) with Annabella, Georges Rigaud and Polla Illery at 7 p.m.; "Le Dernier Milliardaire" (René Clair, 1934) with Max Dearly, Renée Saint-Cyr and Raymond Cordy at 9 p.m. in H-110. English sub-titles. 50c for students, 75c non-students.

FINE ARTS DEPARTMENT: Two plays to be presented in the Douglass Burns Clarke Theatre at 7 and 9 p.m. - "Jack, or the Submission" by Eugene Ionesco and "Almost Like Being" by Jean-Claude van Itallie; free.

SGWU / THIS WEEK



sunday 7

ARMENIAN CLUB: Documentary films at 3:30 p.m. in H-110.

monday 8

WINTER CARNIVAL: Opening 11 a.m. at Drummond and de Maisonneuve with tricycle race to Hall Building - trip to Europe for winner; Alouettes, Canadians and Expos at sports forum in H-110 at 12 p.m. for 25c.

CO-OPERATIST CLUB: Meeting 5 - 6 p.m. in H-665.

tuesday 9

WINTER CARNIVAL: 100 - mile car rally leaves Fairview Shopping Center at 5 p.m.; pub crawl starts at 6:15 p.m. from Union (entry fee \$2 through H-355); night out at Boulevard de Paris, 8:30 p.m. with music by Raphael Exchange (admission \$1 with beer 3 for \$1).

CIVILIZATION: The highly acclaimed colour series by Sir Kenneth Clark is being presented twice each Tuesday; today "Man - The Measure of All things" (early Renaissance) 1 - 2 p.m. and 8:30 - 9:30 p.m. in H-435; free.

wednesday 10

WINTER CARNIVAL: Pollution seminar 1 - 3 p.m. in H-110 with profs Knelman and Leduc to speak; Sir George vs McGill hockey game at McGill Arena, 8:30 p.m. (free), followed by folk night at the Union with beer 4 for \$1.

LIBERAL CLUB: Meeting 2 - 3:30 p.m. in H-635.

SKY DIVING CLUB: Meeting 5:15 - 6 p.m. in H-620.

ISSUES & EVENTS

ISSUES & EVENTS is published weekly by the Information Office of Sir George Williams University. Editorial offices are located in room 211 of the Norris Building, 1435 Drummond Street, Montreal 107 (879-2867). Litho by Journal Offset Inc., 254 Benjamin-Hudon, Ville St. Laurent.



Joel McCormick, editor
Michael Sheldon
Malcolm Stone